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ABSTRACT

Outdoor ethics are primarily concerned with appropriate behaviors of participants as they pursue outdoor recreation activities. Environmental ethics are primarily concerned with developing a more personal sense of stewardship by all members of society, individually and collectively, regarding the use of the environment. The four general categories of environmental ethics are: (1) anthropocentrism, in which choices are based on what is of most benefit to humankind; (2) sentientism, centered on those beings capable of being aware of pleasure and pain; (3) biocentric individualism, in which every living thing has equal defendable interests; and (4) holistics, which considers the welfare of a system of living and non-living things. There are also four stages of environmental awareness which lead to the development of an environmental ethic. In the "awareness" stage, people are aware that a problem exists, but figure someone else will take care of it. During "realization," there is concern that a major part of the problem is a world population which is too large to support. In the "shallow ecology" stage, people realize that society is facing a serious problem, but assume that technology, economics, or politics will solve the problem. The final stage of "deep ecology" sees preserving the integrity of the ecosystem as the major goal. The document includes an outdoor ethics worksheet for outdoor educators to use with students to help them develop ethical guidelines prior to an outdoor trip. A list of 73 selected readings, newsletters, and journals on outdoor and environmental ethics also are provided. (KS)

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Outdoor and Environmental Ethics: Strategies for Implementation

Some Definitions

Ethics can be defined as:

- -Any set of moral principles and values
- -A system of rules for guiding specific behaviors
- -A philosophical position on what ought to be
- -"A limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence" (Aldo Leopold, 1948)

Ethics help us to decide what course of action is most right. They help us answer the question, 'What is the most right thing to do?'

Another way of looking at ethics, and comparing them to laws:

Laws govern what you do when someone else is watching. Ethics guide your behavior when no one else is around.

Outdoor Ethics:

Outdoor ethics are primarily concerned with **appropriate behaviors** of participants as they pursue outdoor recreation activities. Because of the increased interest in outdoor pursuits, the increase in population and the general decrease in areas available and suitable for these outdoor recreation activities, outdoor ethics considerations have become critical.

Environmental Ethics:

Environmental ethics are primarily concerned with developing a more **personal sense of stewardship** by all members of society, individually and collectively, regarding the use of the environment. Environmental ethics offer guidelines which will enable **all** members of earth's global village to be sustained at current or better standards of living indefinitely, **without detriment to humankind, fellow beings or the earth.**

Categories of Environmental Ethical Positions

Bruce E. Matthews

There are four general categories of environmental ethics. Each represents a different way of looking at environmental issues. None of these are inherently right or wrong. All are ethical. By understanding each of these we are able to empathize, and understand the reasons why an individual advocates one course of action over another.

These four ethical positions can be viewed in terms of defendable interests. A thing is known to be right or good if it supports that area with the most defendable interest. Inherent in this concept is the assumption that a hierarchy may exist, in which certain populations, species etc. may have more defendable interests than another.

Anthropocentrism : Humankind centered.

Views defendable interests as vested first in human beings. Primary consideration given to value or impact of a course of action on humankind. All other beings or systems subordinate to humans. Choices are made based on what is most right or of most benefit to humankind. Places humans at top of hierarchy.

examples: -We must save the planet because it is our only home.
-Stop rainforest destruction because there might be as yet unknown species of plants or animals there that hold the key to the cure for cancer.
-The landfill can't go here because it is too beautiful a landscape to destroy.
-Acid rain kills the Adirondack trout I like to catch, so stop acid rain.

Sentientism : Centered on those beings capable of being aware, conscious, of knowing pleasure and pain.

Views defendable interests equally extended to and including all creatures considered to be sentient. This commonly includes many mammals and birds, but disagreement exists among sentientists as to what creatures are, in fact sentient. Humankind has no more defendable interests or rights than any other sentient being.

examples: -We must save the planet because it is the home of all sentient beings.
-Humankind has no right to destroy another sentient creature's home (ie rain forests) for humans' benefit.
-The irradiation or contamination of sentient creatures or their homes in order to dispose of human-produced waste is wrong.

Biocentric Individualism : All life-centered.

Every individual living thing has equal defendable interests with every other living thing. All life is deserving of equal moral consideration. The emphasis is on individuals, both plants and animals.

Typically, an individual espousing this ethical position would do everything possible to avoid harming another living thing. Alternatives would be sought in that would minimize destruction of any life. For example, a biocentric individualist would choose to eat those things which do not involve killing or possible mistreatment of the food source, such as eating fruits and vegetables where the plant was not harmed, and eating non-factory-farmed eggs and dairy products.

examples: -We save the planet because humankind has no right to destroy the life of any living thing.

-We prevent the destruction of rain forests because only humankind benefits from its destruction, to the detriment of all the living things in that rain forest.

-Landfills contaminate and destroy life of all kinds, and therefore is wrong.

Holistic : Entire system-centered, views systems or species as a whole.

The welfare of a system of living and non-living things (ecosystem, biotic community) is the primary defendable interest. Any individual species' personal interest or need is subjugated to that of the system as a dynamic entity. A variety of functions can occur within a system which, as long as the integrity of the system itself is not threatened. may be ethically permissible from a holistic perspective. Humankind is viewed as a part of the system, with rights pertaining to its role in and responsibility for maintaining the system.

examples: -Save the planet because it is a unique and wonderful system.

-Rain forest ecosystems are unique, and likely play a major role in maintaining the earth's entire ecosystem. It is wrong to destroy them.

-If a landfill, toxic or radioactive waste dump can be developed and managed without impacting the ecosystem, it may be o.k., as long as the waste being stored is in fact necessary and there are no other more environmentally sound disposal alternatives.

-Acid rain is an unacceptable phenomenon, since it has major impacts on a number of ecosystems.

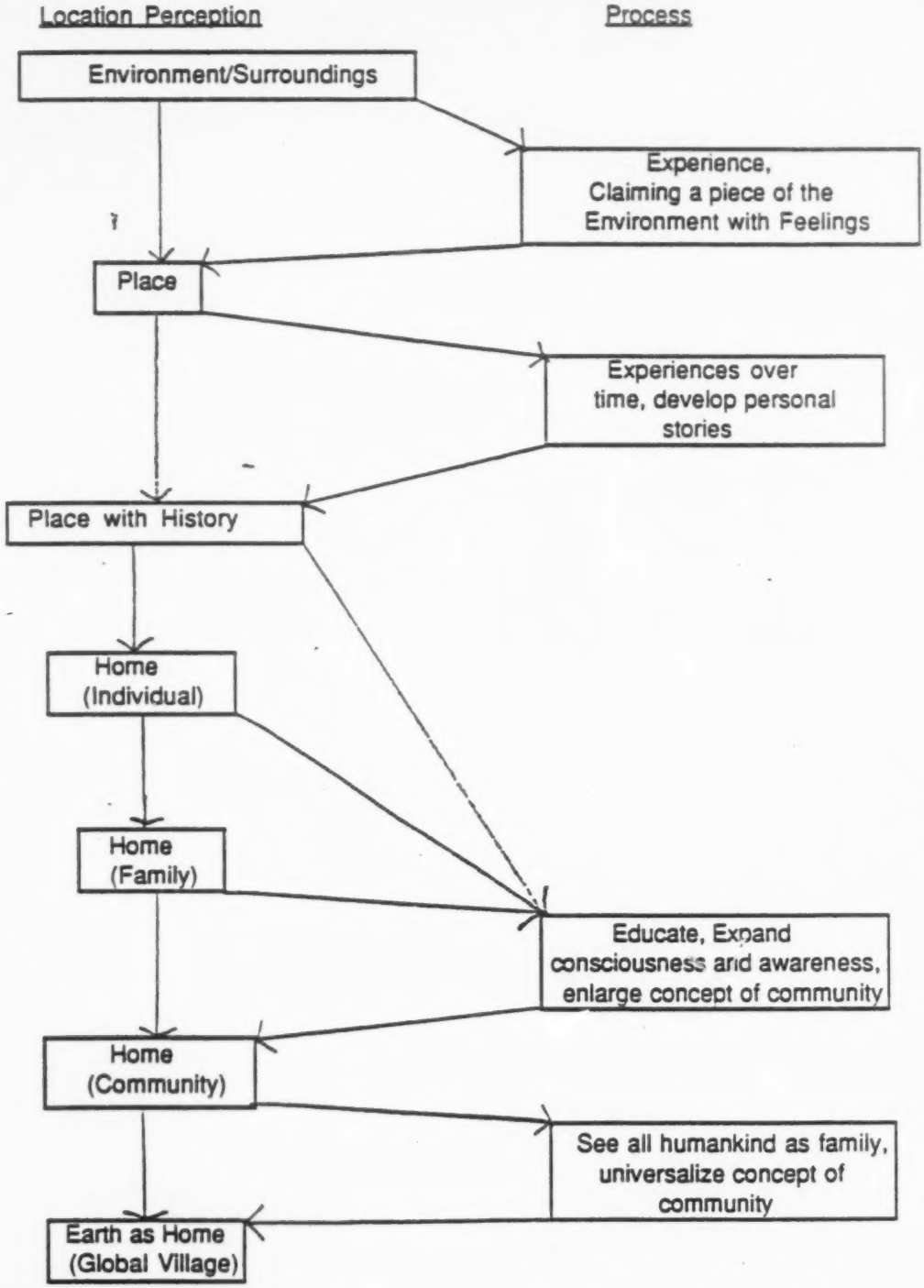
It can be seen that an individual could hold any of these environmental ethical positions, or even a combination of them, and view themselves as ethical, knowing what the most right course of action might be. Each of the four positions abhors the destruction of rain forests, yet each has a different reason for doing so. This may explain why groups of individuals (trappers and animal rightists for example) can be so violently opposed to one another, yet still possess an overabiding concern for the resource, still see themselves as environmentally ethical.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." -Aldo Leopold

Bruce E. Matthews, 3/1/90

Model for the Development of Environmental Ethics

assumption: Most people do not trash their homes.



prepared by Bruce E. Matthews, 2/7/90

Stages Leading to the Development of an Environmental Ethic

Aldo Leopold, in his classic ***A Sand County Almanac*** writes that humankind has evolved an ethic, a philosophical position on what ought to be, that guides behaviors toward oneself and towards fellow human beings. Yet this ethical relationship, according to Leopold, has not yet evolved to include humankind's relationship to the land, and this lack of ethical consideration has led to the current environmental crises we experience today. (and Leopold wrote this in the 1940's!)

Leopold uses the story of Odysseus from Homer's Illiad. When Odysseus returned from the Trojan Wars he found that his slave girls has misbehaved in his absence, so he hung them all. Our society has generally evolved since Homer's time to the point where owning slaves, not to mention killing another human being, is ethically abhorent. Leopold points out that we still regard the land in the same way Odysseus regarded his slave girls, as ours to do with what we see fit. Leopold contends that we need, as a society today, to make the same kind of progress toward developing a land ethic that society has made since Odysseus' time in its ethical consideration of fellow human beings.

There are four stages of environmental awareness that lead to the development of an environmental ethic. This model works equally well when applied to individuals as well as society. They are:

Awareness : In this stage there is awareness that a problem exists, solid waste disposal or acid rain as examples, but you figure that someone else will take care of it or you can just pay for the solution.

Realization : At this stage you begin to realize that a large part of the problem is due to the number of people on the planet being large to be supported in any kind of sustainable manner. Patterns begin to emerge where you see the poor people tending to overbreed and the rich people tending to overgraze. You are concerned.

Shallow Ecology : In this stage you realize that we are facing a very serious problem, but in reasoning it out you figure that somehow technology, economics or politics will save the day. I mean, they've pulled through for us all right so far, haven't they?

There are two false assumptions inherent in shallow ecology. The first is the assumption that technology, economics and politics are in fact capable of dealing with the incredible complexities of today's environmental problems. The second is that we can control the environment, and completely understand it.

Deep Ecology : According to Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, true deep ecology is reached when an individual or society actually lives the following ideas:

1. Everything is connected to everything else.
2. The role of humankind is not to rule the natural world but to cooperate with it, become members of it, and assume responsibility for the consequences of human actions.
3. Excessive attempts to control the environment will backfire, for nature is far too complex for us to completely understand.
4. Our major goal must be to preserve the integrity of our ecosystem, even if it means changing our social system.

Bruce E. Matthews, 3/1/90

Outdoor Ethics Worksheet

Bruce E. Matthews

As outdoor educators we are concerned with developing and promoting appropriate and responsible behaviors while outdoors. The awareness of what constitutes good and bad behavior, coupled with the "motivation and character to be as concerned for others in every respect as one is for one's self" (Petzoldt, Wilderness Handbook), is what we ought to be practicing ourselves and inspiring in others.

Imagine that today we are about to take a group of students on a day hike to the top of Hunter Mountain. We are interested in doing more than reading rules to students and threatening dire consequences if they are not obeyed to the letter (are you sure about that man-eating grizzly last seen near the mountain's summit?!). We would like to use the occasion to assist students in seeing for themselves the value of behaving ethically. The worksheet below may help you and your group to think about the kinds of behaviors that ought to occur and the obligations that ought to exist when the group is acting ethically. Complete the worksheet as a group, and then regard it as a code, or a contract. Encourage each individual in the group to accept the responsibility of abiding by it personally, and assisting each other to do the same. It may help to have each student sign it.

In order to assist in identifying those specific ethical obligations, responsibilities and behaviors it may be helpful to break them down into categories. These categories are admittedly arbitrary, and involve some overlapping between them.

As you work through these categories include everything that you think may fit. Do not be overly concerned whether the behavior described really fits the definition of 'ethics'. You can always go back and eliminate the stuff that is not relevant.

This is designed to be used as a worksheet. You may find it useful to develop these ethical guidelines with your students or groups and then review them each time you go outdoors. If they participate in the development they are more likely to feel ownership. Once the behaviors, responsibilities or obligations are identified they can be referred to throughout the trip, and can be evaluated by the students during debriefings and discussions.

I. Individuals and group to other individuals(non-group) met along the way:

II. Individuals to other individuals within the group:

III. Individuals to group as a whole:

IV. Group to individuals within the group:

V. Group to other hikers:

VI. Individuals and group to other users of resource:

VI. Individuals and group to administrative agencies:

VII. Individuals and group to landowner:

IX. Individuals and group to local community:

X. Individuals and group to living resources:

XI. Individuals and group to non-living resources:

Checklist:

1. Are we setting the example ourselves?
2. Are we offering experiences that lead our students to conclude for themselves that there is value and purpose in acting ethically, and that it feels right to do so?
3. Are we creating situations where outdoor and environmental ethics are discussed, and ethical behaviors are practiced?
4. Are we recognizing and rewarding when we see ethical behavior demonstrated?
5. Are we "teaching" ethics through:
    a. observation
    b. demonstration
    c. discussion
    d. practice
    e. clarification
    f. reinforcement?
6. Are we identifying issues where conflicting ethical stances may exist, and giving students an opportunity to try out which stance most closely fits their personal values, in a non-threatening and non-proselytizing environment?

Bruce E. Matthews, 10/3/90

Outdoor Ethics Worksheet

I. Individuals and group to other individuals(non-group) met along the way:

II. Individuals to other individuals within the group:

III. Individuals to group as a whole:

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VI. Individuals and group to other users of resource:

VI. Individuals and group to administrative agencies:

VII. Individuals and group to landowner:

IX. Individuals and group to local community:

X. Individuals and group to living resources:

XI. Individuals and group to non-living resources:

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Credits

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